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## ABSTRACT

One of the major problems in advertising courses is that students are expected to generate original, exciting advertising ideas, but often are not taught how to go about the process. Idea generation techniques can help students generate quantities of creative ideas more quickly and fluently. By looking at ads and recreating the workings of the creative minds behind them, ways in which ideas are produced can be highlighted. The beginning of idea generation is a matter of isolating themes as they are derived from features, selling points, and benefits. If a theme is the "matter" of an ad, an idea is the "manner" of the ad. An idea bank, consisting of layout pages where seeds of ideas are sketched and including a grid logging key features, selling points and benefits, is a means of keeping track of one's creative consciousness. Idea generation techniques include: (1) associations (again based on features, selling points, and benefits); (2) opposites, including list opposites, media opposites, expectation opposites, and competition opposites; (3) verbal plays, including onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration, and multiple meanings; and (4) clocks and calendars (referring to time, seasons, etc.). (Thirteen photocopies of ads illustrating the techniques discussed are attached.) (SR)

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IDEA GENERATION TECHNIQUES  
QUANTITIES OF AD IDEAS IN MINIMUM TIME

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Submitted for consideration to ADVERTISING TEACHING STANDARDS

AEJMC-Advertising Division, 1989

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## Abstract

One of the major problems in advertising creative courses is that students are expected to generate original, exciting advertising ideas, but they often don't know how to do that. Many times, they are simply told to be creative. And it is left at that, with the probable result being student frustration and anxiety at the thought of facing the mysterious unknown of creativity. As a refinement, elaboration and expansion of a previous paper from 1987, this paper proposes a number of idea generation techniques that can help students generate quantities of creative ideas more quickly and fluently. The essence of the paper is that creating ad ideas is a craft complete with recoverable and understandable techniques. By looking at ads and re-creating the workings of the creative minds behind them, one can highlight ways ideas come to be. Those ways can then be applied as techniques for helping students generate ideas.

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## IDEA GENERATION TECHNIQUES QUANTITIES OF AD IDEAS IN MINIMUM TIME

"Now don't forget. Be creative with your ideas. Be different."

This is not an uncommon piece of advice given to ad students in creative courses. The problem is that it's easier said than done. Too often students look bright eyed in agreement as if they understand. Then, when class is over and those sage words are stuck in their minds, they leave. From that point, their eyes glaze over when they realize they're not sure of how to be creative or different with their ideas. They begin to realize that they don't have the techniques for unleashing their creativity And they don't know how to go about finding them. The result is anxiety all around and an inevitable blocking of their creative thinking. When they return to class, they lug one, perhaps two or three half-baked ideas or headlines, and they wince at the thought of having to repeat the entire process all over again on the next assignment. Frustrated and anxious, it's downhill from there.

One of the ways to help students avoid this frustration and anxiety and get in touch with their creative powers is to urge them to see the entire creative process as a shaping and building process. This means a literal shaping and building process conducted by a craftsman adept at techniques, specialized techniques relevant to the craft. These techniques are easily on call. When it comes time for implementing a plan, the practices carpenter won't have to search for them. The mind automatically knows what they are and how to apply them.

It's the same with advertising creativity. To come up with what Ogilvy claims is the *Big Idea*, the writer or artist must have the techniques for meeting the task. More so, there should be many techniques, and they must be on call so that time's not wasted and deadlines are met. The way for students to find those techniques and how they can be used to examine existing ads while re-creating the workings of the creative minds behind them. In a sense,

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it's a matter of reducing and simplifying choice ads (and choice minds) to common creative denominators. This holds true for key stages in the advertising creative process as well, including getting ready to generate creative ideas.

### Begin with a Theme

By the way of reduction and simplicity, most ads can be reduced to a key theme. The theme is the *matter* of the ad. This means it is the ad's content. It answers What am I selling? The most dominant answer is singular. Most ads can be reduced to one, key, singular theme. This doesn't mean there aren't other themes within an ad. It simply means that one theme dominates.

To see how this works, ask the students to reduce the following well-known advertising campaigns to a single theme, often a single word. For example, what are the themes in the historically popular campaigns for Maytag, Parkay, Federal Express, and Charmin? Yes, those advertisers have stories to tell. And yes, the research and planning going into those stories were no doubt expensive. But, when it was all said and done, what evolved were creative ideas dominated by single themes. For Maytag the theme is durability. For Parkay the theme is buttery taste. For Federal Express the theme is fast. And for Charmin the theme is squeezable softness.

Remind the students that these themes are not in themselves extraordinary. Other washing machines are durable. Other margarines have buttery taste. Other express companies are fast. And other toilet tissues are soft. Of course, it's certainly possible that those themes are the distinct USPs for those advertisers. They may be what differentiates those advertisers from their competition. For example, Charmin may be *softer* than other tissues. And at the time of the Parkay campaign, the competition may not have advertised its buttery taste, despite the fact that it may have had it. Still, however, in this age of parity products, a strong USP may be difficult to find. It doesn't matter, though, because what can always be found is a creative and different way of expressing the theme.

Students tend to have a fairly easy time answering the following question. What tends to be more different, the competing brands in a product class or the individual advertising

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ideas for those brands? You can use beer or soft drinks as examples. Many students may be inclined to say that most brands of beer and soft drinks to be more similar than dissimilar. But, the advertising for those brands tends to be more dissimilar than similar. The overall point of the question is to lead students to the understanding that the creative and different ideas expressing similar themes are what comprise a large part of advertising creativity. In order to get to the creative ideas, however, the themes have to be isolated. And regardless of whether the product or service to be advertised is parity or not, the beginning point of idea generation is selecting the key theme.

The key theme is a reduction or simplification of what's to be sold. It is derived from research findings. Usually, it is linked to features, selling points or benefits. Features are the physical characteristics of products or services. Selling points are what those features *give* to the consumer. And benefits are what those selling points *mean* to the consumer. For example, in the case of Maytag, features would include workmanship, machine parts and materials, and construction techniques. Selling points derived from all of those features would include durability, reliability, and longlastingness. But, benefits go another step into meaning. Durability, for instance, could mean lack of worry about not meeting one's family responsibilities. Or, it could mean the positive feeling about saving money in the long term.

Every product, store or service has features, selling points and benefits. For example, a store may have an experienced and knowledgeable sales staff. That's a feature. The selling point may be the amount of reliable information a consumer can gain. And the benefit may be a feeling of confidence about the goods to be purchased. As another example, a petsitting service may have a home pick-up and drop-off policy. That's a feature. The selling point may be convenience. And the benefit of convenience may be that the consumer has more time to accomplish other tasks.

The overall point of all of this as far as students are concerned is to see the beginning of idea generation as a matter of isolating themes as they are derived from features, selling points or benefits. For many of us teaching in the classroom, this is a matter of pre-planning and strategy development. And certainly, there are many good books available which devote their energies almost exclusively to this phase of the creative process.

### Move to Ideas

If a theme is the *matter* of an ad and answers to what is to be sold, an idea is the *manner* of the ad and answers how the theme is to be presented. Despite the fact that the theme may be very commonplace or expected (durability, for instance), the idea should be anything but commonplace and expected. Rather, it is a creative and different way of presenting or expressing the theme. Again, you can refer to the Maytag, Parkay, Federal Express, and Charmin ideas as examples. Each one did something different, something unique and out of the ordinary. For instance, as commonplace as a buttery taste may be, the idea of talking margarine is anything but commonplace.

This brings us back to the original problem that students in creative courses must face, the problem of finding a creative and different way of presenting a theme. The way to solve the problem is to use techniques of the creative minds behind the wealth of creative ads always available to students. As with themes, it's a matter of reducing or simplifying the ad ideas so that the blueprint for their creative sparks is clear and workable.

### Encourage an Idea Bank

An idea bank is nothing more than layout pages where seeds of ideas are planted. Those seeds are in the form of rough thumbnails, images, and head and copy lines. Over time, these ideas grow and spill over onto other pages. Importantly, however, they are always linked to the roots of the key themes, namely the features, selling points and benefits. Overall, the pages become a means for keeping track of one's creative consciousness as it pertains to the advertising problem to be solved with a creative idea. You can see the evolution of typical idea bank pages in the following visual.

Insert Slide 1 about here

Notice that at the top of the first page a grid is formed. The purpose of the grid is to log key features, selling points and benefits. Clearly, some should be more key than others. And certainly, a key theme should be one of the first things to evolve from this grid. From here the students use the pages to log their ideas.

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Once the key features, selling points and benefits are logged on the grid and the key theme is isolated, the students can begin to generate ideas. But again, it's one thing to tell them to do that and quite another thing to expect speed and skill in their efforts. What they need to help them are those techniques used by creative minds and exemplified in a number of ads.

### Use Idea Generation Techniques

As an expansion of techniques presented in a previous paper in 1987, the following variations are ways students can wield control over their creative powers. These variations represent a variety of techniques acting as the techniques students need to generate creative ideas more quickly and fluently. Once again, the features, selling points, benefits, and the themes are the origins of student ideas. As such, they will help students keep on strategy and within strategic guidelines.

#### Associations

Starting from their information at the top of the first idea bank page, students can work from the following formula,  $A + B = C$ , in order to generate ideas based on *associations*. The A equals the various features, selling points, benefits, and themes. The B equals what those features, selling points, benefits, and themes are like. And the C equals the joining of A and B to generate creative ideas in the form of visual images or a headlines. The core of the technique is centered on the creative mind's ability to associate "like" things. Once the A and B criteria are determined, the mind connects the two parts at the root of the association and generates idea possibilities. To see how this can work, notice the three ads in the upcoming slides. They represent a range of associations.

Insert Slide 2 about here

In the first ad for Wheaties, a *feature association* is made. Here, the feature is that of the shape of a Wheaties flake. That would be the A in the formula. The B of the formula represents what that shape is like, in this case a medal. By combining the A and B of the



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formula, the mind is able to dissolve their separate realities and replace them with a single reality, the associative newness of a creative idea.

Insert Slide 3 about here

In the second ad for UPS, a *selling point association* is made. Here, the selling point of speed is combined with an airplane in order to yield the core of the creative idea, that of a UPS mailing landing like an airplane on a desk.

Insert Slide 4 about here

In the third ad for Maxell, a *benefit association* is made. This goes a step beyond the selling point association in that the meaning of the product to the consumer is given special importance. In this case, what Maxell means to the consumer is that he or she can be "blown away" by the extraordinary clarity and impact of the tape's sound.

For each of these three ads, it is clear that the creative minds behind the ideas were free in their ability to create something new and different. This meant they were unfettered by preconceived notions of what reality can or cannot be. Instead, they elasticized reality. They went beyond what is ordinarily expected and, in all three cases, created their own realities, those of the creative ideas.

For students, these three ads should exemplify just how the creative mind can play at its task. A Wheaties flake has a certain shape. When combined with another shape like it, it yields a creative idea. UPS gives speed. When combined with other things giving speed, it, too, yields a creative idea. Maxell tapes mean you can get blown away. And when combined with a large wind, a creative idea emerges.

When setting out to generate ideas, then, the first thing for students to do is to form associations based on their lists of key features, selling points, benefits, and themes. Of course, the key themes become central to it all since the themes should control ad messages. What the students are after, though is an inventive and original way to present those messages. Associations based on features, selling points, benefits, and themes are one means to find an original way.

### Opposites

In my previous paper I discussed the use of *opposites* generally as an idea generation technique. There was little delineation of certain types of opposites. Now, however, students can be encouraged to expand this technique by using four variations: *list opposites*, *media opposites*, *expectation opposites*, and *competition opposites*. All of the variations make use of reversals. This means they do the opposite of what's typically expected according to the four criteria of their original lists of features, selling points, benefits, and themes, then new lists of media features, audience expectations and competition advertising.

In terms of list opposites, students again refer to the information from the grids on the first page of their idea bank. Then, they think of reversals of key terms. For instance, if softness is a key term (a selling point in the Charmin example), students can begin generating by using hardness. Perhaps a creative idea of rolls of toilet tissue as rolls of cement would be appropriate. Or, in the case of Hunter Fan in our next slide, the opposite of quietness is loudness and becomes the generative spark for the creative ideas.

Insert Slide 5 about here

Once they have exhausted possibilities derived from the opposites of those key terms on their lists, the students can turn their attention to the media. Here, the students should list the features of the media in which their ads will appear. For instance, if an ad is to appear in a magazine, then the features might include such characteristics as paper, pages, flatness, and color. The students are then encouraged to reverse these features in order to stimulate ideas. For example, the Transamerica ad in our next slide makes use of a media opposite.

Insert Slide 6 about here

In this ad, the first page is turned to reveal a pop-up of the Transamerica building in San Francisco. This is an opposite of flatness, a feature of the medium. By reversing flatness, the creative mind behind the ad could see the possibilities of doing a pop-up visual. In effect, the technique allowed that mind to keep itself open to possibilities.

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Regardless of the medium to be used, the same technique of media opposites can be applied. The students simply list the features of the medium and then reverse those features for creative ideas. With television, for instance, what would happen if the features of sound, full color or scene were reversed? Could an ad be whispered or shouted? Could it be in black and white or in a touch of spot color such as in the recent Nuprin pain reliever television campaign? Could the motion be stopped in favor of typography as in the recent Goodyear tire television campaign? Again, the selection of medium is unimportant as far as generating ideas is concerned since the features of all media can be reversed.

Another variation of opposites is to reverse audience expectations. Surely, audience members bring preconceived expectations to ad messages and techniques. The variation here centers again on reversal, this time the reversal of what is typically expected by the audience. For example, the Cosmopolitan ad in our slide exemplifies an expectation opposite.

Insert Slide 7 about here

As audience members, we expect to see images facing out from a page, not into it. Yet, the Cosmopolitan ad contains the opposite. Here, the images, include the magazine name, face into the page. They are reversed, and consequently our expectations are jarred. The result is that we pay attention since we are not quite used to seeing things the way they are expressed in this ad.

The final variation of opposites is to create a reversal of what the competition does in its advertising. For instance, in the communications industry, major business corporations such as AT&T or MCI tend to be serious and more buttoned-up in their advertising. Since that's the case, then the creative mind will think of ways to do the opposite. In the AT&T ad in our next slide, the cartoon format with the Superman hero runs against the grain of what the competition (and even AT&T) typically do in their advertising.

Insert Slide 8 about here

These four variations of one technique will give students additional tools with which to craft ad ideas. They will also encourage creative thinking. Instead of the regimentation

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of how things are expected to be, students are allowed to branch outward to how things might be. As a result, they begin to stretch reality and go beyond the commonplace expected.

### Verbal Plays

Another technique for generating ideas quickly is that of *verbal plays*. This technique is based on the juggling of words, mostly in the context of poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, rhyme, alliteration, or multiple meanings. As with the previous techniques, it begins with students referring to the original lists. What the students must do, however, is keep an ear and eye open to twists or plays on words. The stammered H in the popular "H-H-H-Hershey's, One of the All-Time Greats" is an example of a verbal play. As another case in point, a creative idea for Price Pfister, a manufacturer of bath fixtures, makes use of an alliterative verbal play in order to get the product name remembered by the viewer.

Insert Slide 9 about here

Notice how the key words, those indicating product selling points, are also part of the verbal play crafted by the creative minds behind this ad. Everything begins with PF, thus aiding memorability of the selling points and the product name.

From their lists, students can pluck key words and apply any one of a number of poetic devices to the representation of these words. As another example, notice the off-rhyme of jiggle for jingle in this Jello ad.

Insert Slide 10 about here

Or, in the case of the Ten Huntington Bar and Restaurant ad, notice the double meaning given to the word consommé.

Insert Slide 11 about here

In both the Jello and restaurant ads, the creative minds juggled words. They played with sounds and meanings. Importantly, however, those sounds and meanings were directly related to something important about the advertisers. For Jello, jiggle relates directly to a

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product feature, a physical characteristic of the product. For the restaurant ad as well, consommé relates directly to a feature of the restaurant, in this case a menu item.

As with the other techniques, verbal plays are a means for students to generate ideas quickly and fluently. Running through their lists of key features, selling points, benefits, themes, and even product names, students can elasticize the realities of key terms by applying poetic devices. This will help give their ideas originality and memorability.

### Clocks and Calendars

As a final technique, students can generate ideas by using *clocks and calendars*. This technique refers to time and happenings or occurrences in time. For instance, if an ad is to appear during the Christmas season, then creative ideas can be generated by using a variety of images, songs or words relevant to that season. As an example, notice the visual reference to two Christmas images in these two Tangueray ads shown in our next slide.

Insert Slide 12 about here

In one ad, a wreath is used to contain the product bottle. In the other, a Christmas tree is used. For students, however, any Christmas image should be seen as a possible seed for an idea. Certainly, a sleigh, a stocking, a snowman, or even a gift package could be just as appropriate for this particular product. Or, perhaps, for any product. The point overall is that the season became a starting point for arriving at the idea.

Not only can time be important to the generation of ideas, but those happenings or occurrences in time can be just as important. For instance, notice how the Bayer ad idea uses a special occurrence in time as the essence of its creativity.

Insert Slide 13 about here

In this ad, considerable press coverage at this point in time was given to the health benefits of aspirin, especially those beyond pain relief. Aspirin was found to be beneficial in preventing heart attacks. What the creative mind behind the ad did, then, was to pick up on a particular piece of news taking place in time and use it for an ad idea.

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Using clocks and calendars as a technique requires that students go beyond their original lists. It requires that they understand when the product is to be used and bought, or when the ad will appear. Even still, in matching these time variables with key terms from their lists, students can continue to generate ideas. In fact, anything that gets students beyond the stage of frustration is worthwhile in this respect.

### Techniques in Review

The starting point for using these idea generation techniques is rooted in organized, strategic thinking based on features, selling points, benefits, and themes. Once determinations are made regarding these key terms and creative directions, students can begin to expand beyond the more regimented strategic thinking and into the more open creative thinking. In essence, it is a kind of evolutionary, crafting process beginning with strategy and ending with creativity. The key to making the link between the two is using the determinations from strategy as the origin for creativity.

With the idea generation techniques as a guide, students are more easily able to get in touch with their creative powers. Even more so, they are able to understand how those powers are directly related to many of the existing ads they see or hear each day. By reducing and simplifying those ads from a creative point of view, they are able to isolate and highlight the techniques of the creative mind. And, when confronted with their own advertising idea problems demanding creative solutions, they can then use those techniques quickly and fluently.

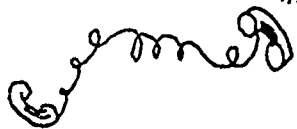
Features	Selling Points	Benefits
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A+B=C



opposites  
verbal  
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A+B=C



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opposites  
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O + Q =

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SYMBOLS

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A+B=C



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opposites  
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competition

Reverse  
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closure

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CONTENT

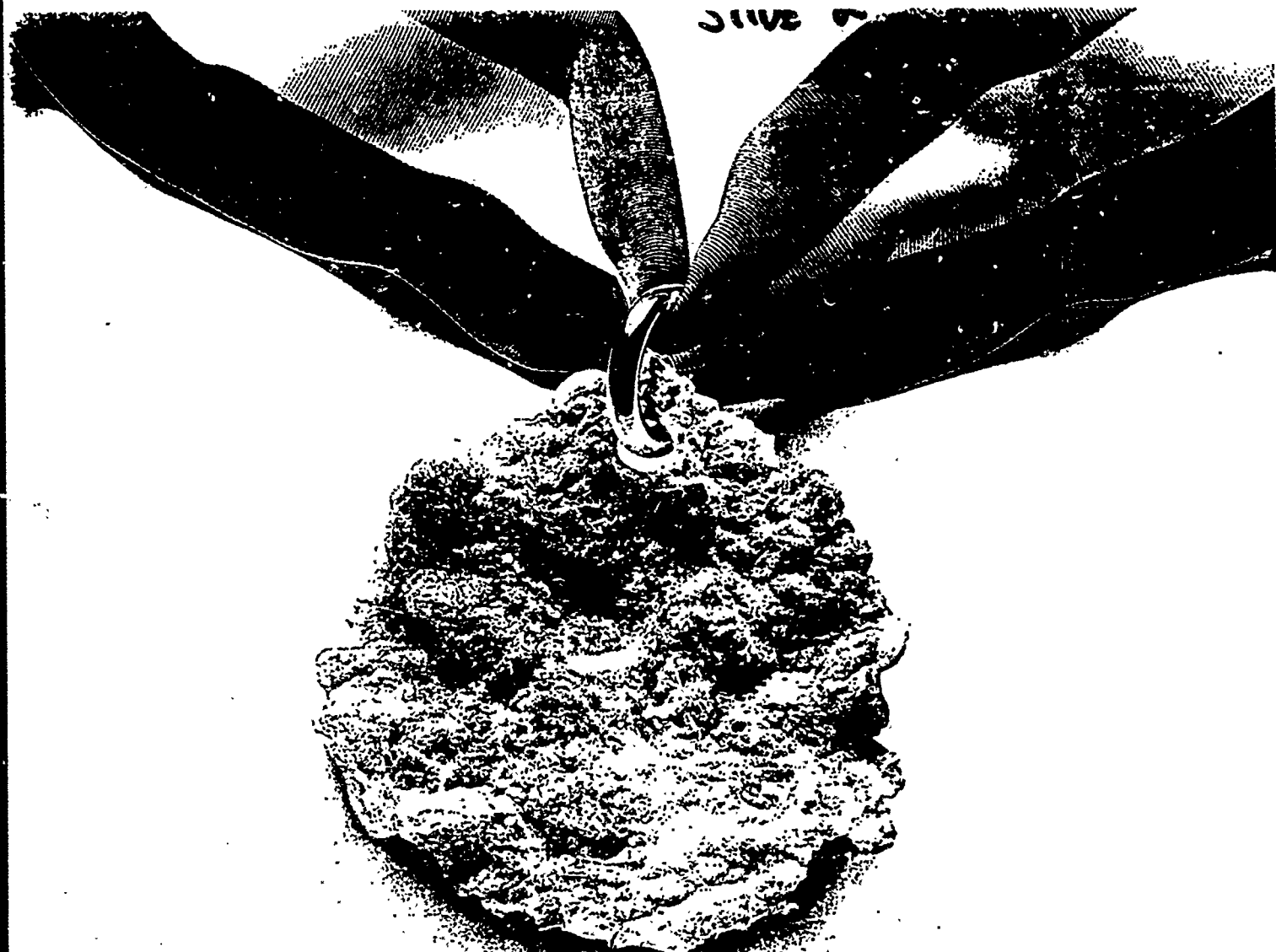
O + Q =

forced  
relationships

SYMBOLS

Syncretistic  
emotion





# *The taste of glory.*

*It's a taste as big as the championship moments it  
has shared. A winning taste, glorious in its simplicity.*

*Wheaties.*

*Just good whole wheat. Pure and simple.*

*Toasted to the golden height of perfection. As honest and bold a taste,  
as it is a symbol.*

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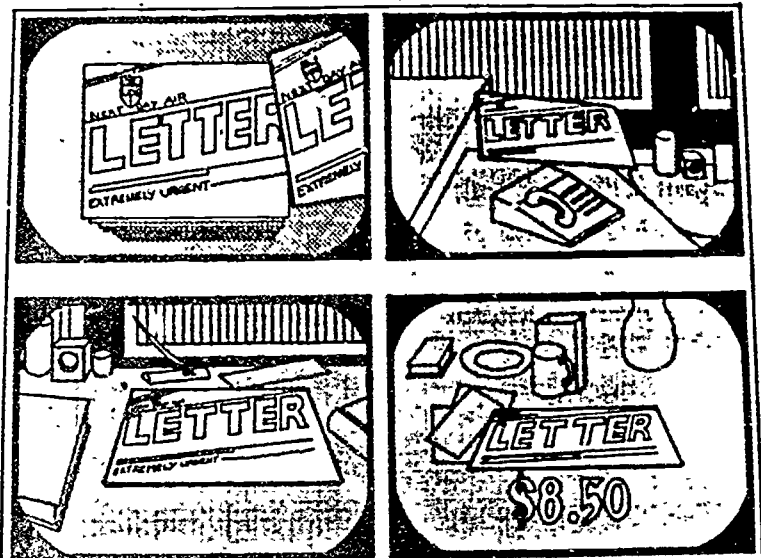


*The Breakfast of Champions.*

©General Mills, Inc. 1985



SLIDE 7



# AFTER 500 PLAYS OUR HIGH FIDELITY TAPE STILL DELIVERS HIGH FIDELITY.

Slide #4



If your old favorites don't sound as good as they used to, the problem could be your recording tape.

Some tapes show their age more than others. And when a tape ages prematurely, the music on it does too.

What can happen is, the oxide particles that are bound onto tape loosen and fall off, taking some of your music with them.

At Maxell, we've developed a binding process that helps to prevent this. When oxide particles are bound onto our tape, they stay put. And so does your music.

So even after a Maxell recording is 500 plays old, you'll swear it's not a play over five.

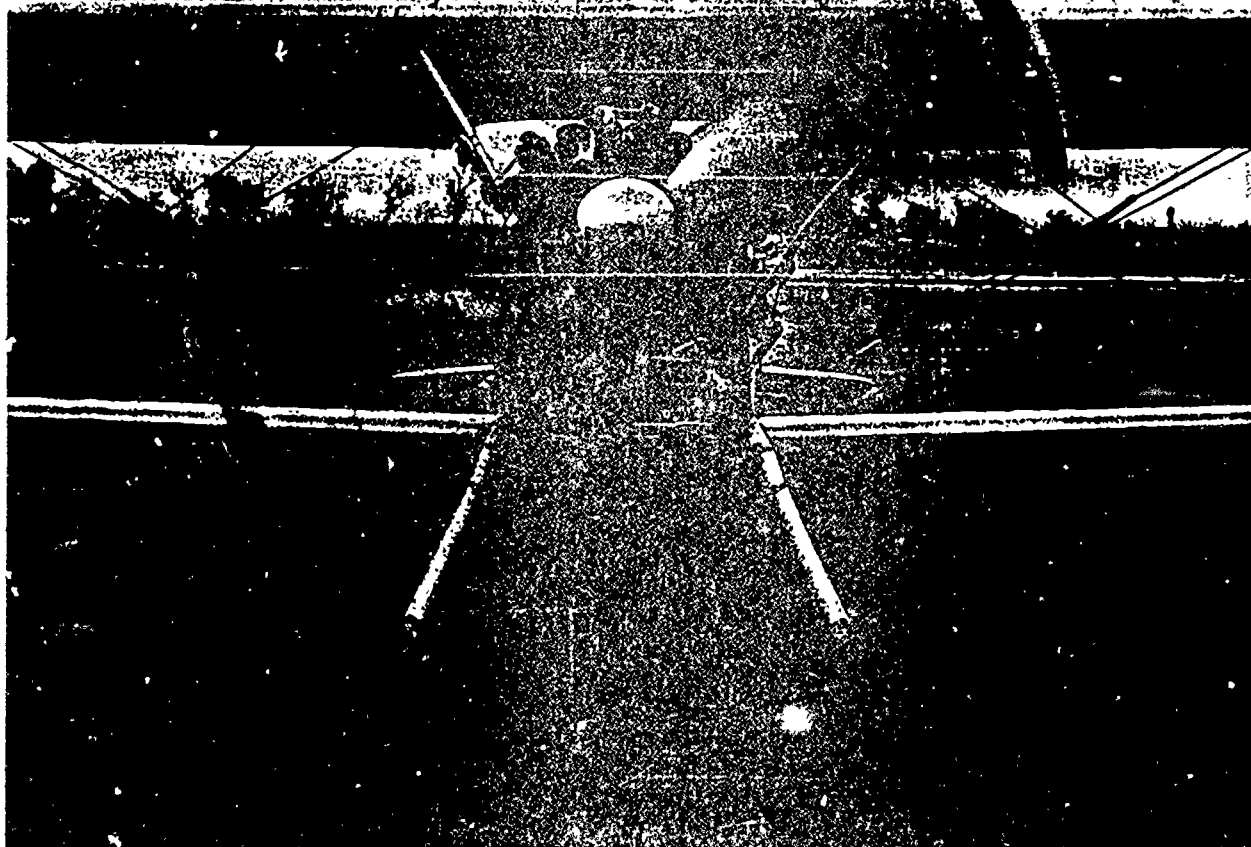


## IT'S WORTH IT.

Maxell Corporation of America, 420 Oak Ridge Avenue, Paramus, N.Y. 11764

SLIDE 5

# THE SOUND OF A CASEY J. HUNTER FAN



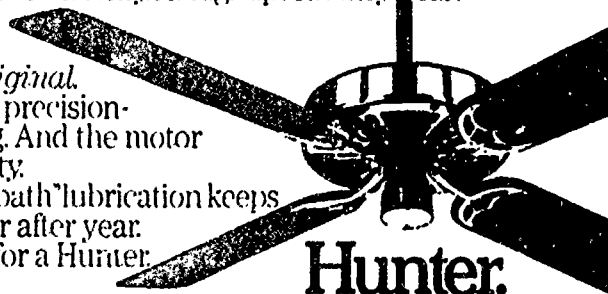
When you buy a ceiling fan these days you never know what you're getting. Even at lowest speeds, some can sound a bit noisy. At high speeds they can shake and rattle like an old biplane.

So how can you be sure of getting a quiet, smooth-running fan? Buy a *Hunter Original*.

Hunter's cast-iron construction and precision-balanced hardwood blades prevent wobbling. And the motor comes with a written limited lifetime warranty.

But more important, our unique "oil bath" lubrication keeps it running silently as a whisper. Year after year after year.

Granted, you may pay a little more for a Hunter. But you'll sleep a lot better, too.



**Hunter.**  
The Quiet Fan.

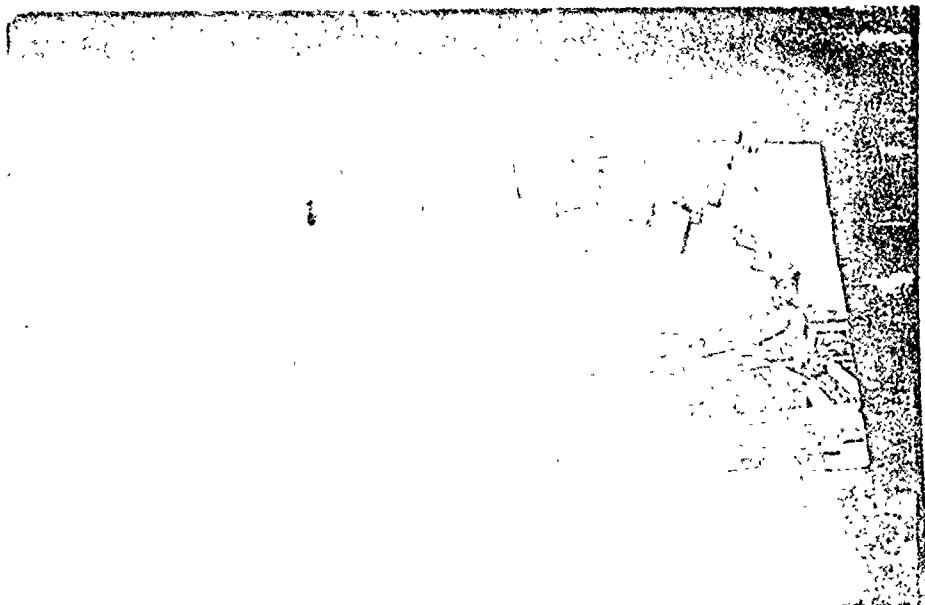
*Hunter... Building The Best For Over 100 Years.*

© 1986, Hunter Fan Co., 2500 Frisco Ave., Memphis, Tenn. 38114, (901) 744-1360

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WOULD THE  
MOST INNOVATIVE  
INSURANCE  
COMPANY  
IN AMERICA  
PLEASE  
STAND UP



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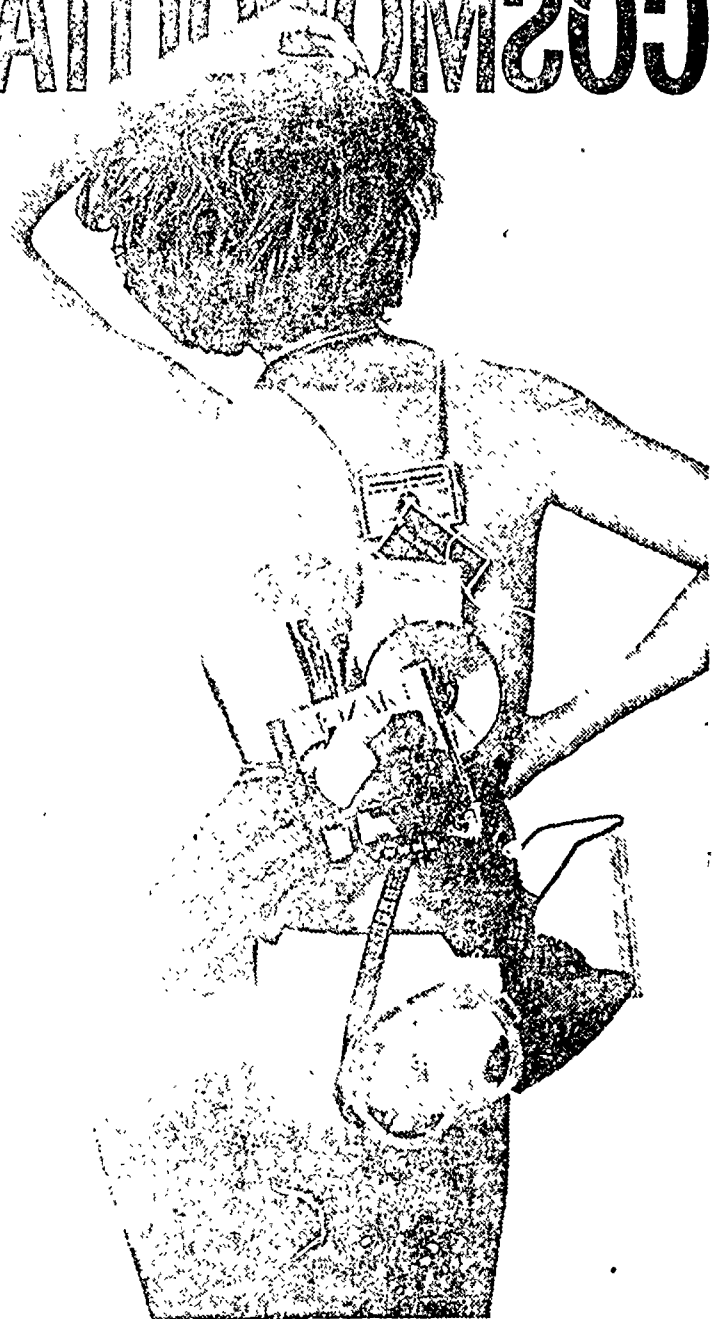
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Slide #7

COSMOPOLITAN



## THE POWER BEHIND THE PRETTY FACE.

You assume she likes to get around.  
To her, that means a new set of wheels.

You figure she likes to keep in shape.  
She knows that includes exercising her mind.

The truth is, the Cosmo girl knows more,  
does more, earns more, spends more.

That's power.

That's the Cosmopolitan girl.

Ac

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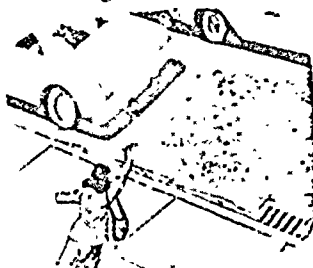
# AT&T Communications-Business

SLIDE 0

Comm. No.: AXEL 6004  
Length: 30 Seconds



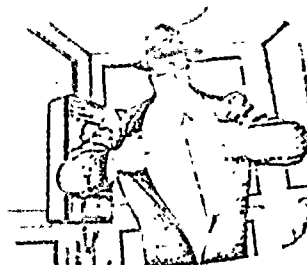
... before the meeting's over.



TAXI!!!



(MUSIC)



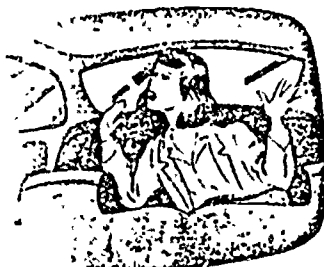
VO: With the AT&T Card...



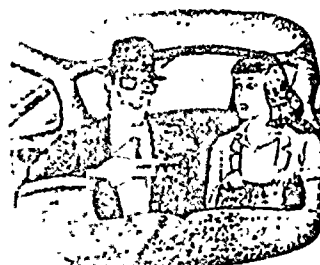
to handle business better.



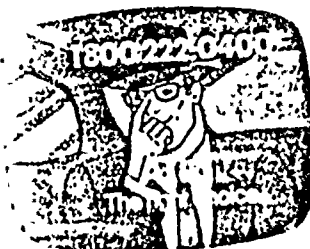
LOIS: TAXI TAXI!!!



LOIS: Come on, Clark...



CLARK: It's OK, Lo, everything's taken care of.



Enter the AT&T Card



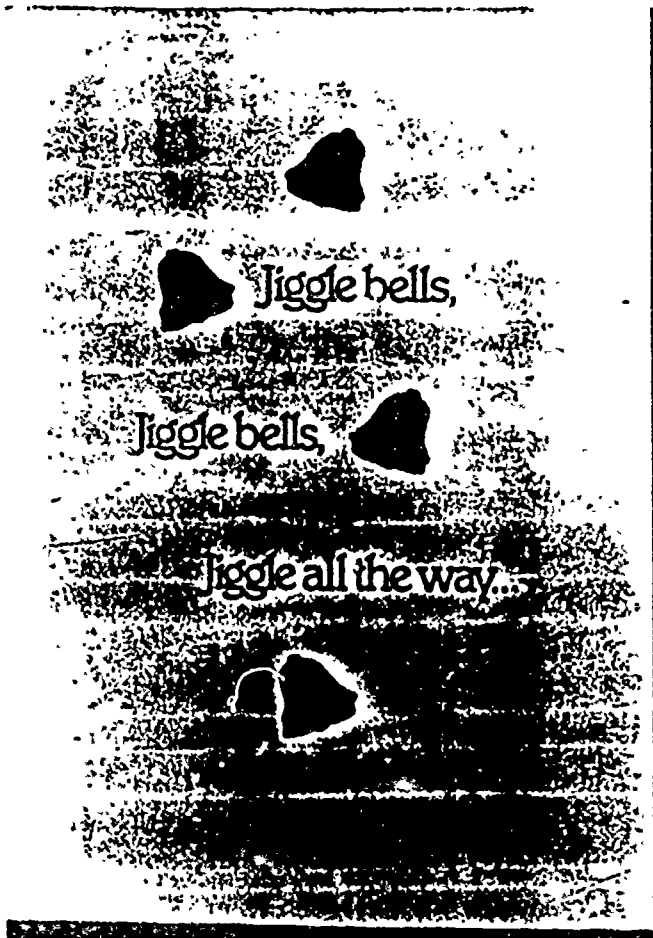
1800-222-0400

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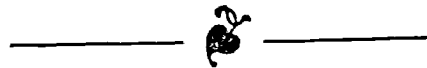
Slide #10



Slide # 11

11

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The health officials said that a newly approved device that can be surgically implanted in patients to counteract severe irregularities in heartbeat might save 10,000 to 20,000 lives a year.

The device, which is implanted in the chest, is designed to last up to four years and the overall results indicated that an operation a day taken by patients who had previous heart attacks reduced the chance of another heart attack or of

the heart causing a heart attack. The new device, whose approval was announced today, is an "implantable cardiac defibrillator," developed by Intec Systems Inc., of Pittsburgh, and

Guinness Sacks, a

2102 13



effective in preventing heart attacks in healthy people. Dr. Frank E. Young, the Commissioner of Food and Drugs, advised heart patients to consult their physicians before adding aspirin to their treatment. He said that aspirin was not a substitute for other treatments to prevent heart attacks.

Mrs. Heckler announced that new professional labeling for aspirin, aimed at doctors rather than consumers,

Aspirin had an even greater effect on patients suffering from "unstable angina," or chest pains that had worsened within the past month, according to one three-month study conducted by the Veterans Administration, the health officials said. In those patients, it cut the risk of progressing to a heart attack, or of dying from a heart attack, in half, from a 12 percent chance without aspirin.

mal rhythm. Most patients suffering from heart rhythm problems are helped by drugs, but about 400,000 now suffering from the conditions are not. The battery powering the device lasts only about two years and must then be surgically replaced.

joye; nov. If poet however demo a va thr rec pa et

Sacks, almost routinely turn out eloquent, polished works. And professional writers regularly move from one form to another with unselfishness.

or simply professional malcontent? In Britain, of course—where it's long been assumed that a proper educated person

poetry or reviews. The fact remains, however, that these artists have all demonstrated a remarkable fluency in variety of forms, as have others. Chekhov been

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per story above says it all. printed it—in the newspaper page 30, a Prune Council ad pays

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Art Direction: Bob Gola  
Photography: Hank Dunning  
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